

PANHANDLERS

Why am I sitting on the sidewalk?



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WHY AM I SITTING ON THE SIDEWALK?

My clothes are tattered and torn.

I stink.

I soften the cold concrete with cardboard.

I have another chunk of cardboard in front of me, scrolled on it: Feed me, I'm hungry.

I can't remember writing those words?

I can't remember where the cardboard came from?

I don't know where home is?

I'm skinny fat.

People keep gliding by; few look my way. I barely exist. I'm hungry.

How did I arrive here?

I'm judging the people walking by. They're mostly ignoring me. Maybe if I had a dog, or better yet, a cat, I'd do better.

Is this my work, my life ambition; if it is: *what the fuck is right with me?*

I feel nauseated, I haven't eaten for days, or *have I?*

What day is it?

Does it matter?

It's warm, yet the concrete is cold. I'm hated by everyone.

"Get a job," is screamed from a passing car.

I can't. I'm drunk, stoned, high or something; hell, stoned and high, are they not the same thing. Maybe, I'm just depressed.

The scream helps. A passerby stops and drops \$5 into my hat on the concrete – adding

substance to my paltry collection of coins. I won't go hungry today; I will consume what my life has come to need. I'm not sure if it's food; I get enough given to me by well-meaning saviours who think I want sustenance more than escape.

I don't want to be here.

I don't know how long I have been?

I'm jonesing for another "fix" of life.

I don't want to be alone. I want to be loved.

Was I ever?

Did I do this to myself?

What the fuck, is; this?

Why does everybody hate me?

I'm no different than you.

A lady stops and offers to help find me shelter and directs me to a line up where I can go eat with the others who look like me.

She doesn't say: "*like me.*"

I discount her kindness. I'm too selfish to understand.

Can I possibly be selfish?

What's my escape? You ask.

I can't remember, conceivably it was booze, drugs, a combination: whatever I could find. Mix it in a bowl or pipe and —

My head hurts. Tomorrow may be a better day. *Fuck that; who am I kidding?* It will be the same.

Whatever put me here is long gone. I can't remember how I failed; I know I have.

One day, when my frail body started to ache constantly, I sat down. It was only to be for a moment until I regained my composure. The following day, and for all the days since I have found my place on the concrete.

I can't get up.

I can't move upward.

I'm invisible.

I stink.

I'm no longer me.

I need to escape.

The world spins.

I fall asleep.

When I wake up, my hat is gone.

When I was five years old, I dreamt of being a professional athlete. I knew the jersey numbers of all the greats. *"One day, I will be one of them."*

Then, somewhere along the way, something happened, I got sick...I think...no, I sustained an injury. My money ran dry. I hit up family, friends, anyone I could for loans.

At first, the loans were for rent, food, you know, life's necessities. Eventually, the harder it was for me to rise, the need for the money changed from one type of necessity to another. As a result, rising became an implausibility.

I became the enabled.

The enablers eventually shunned me.

I fell further.

I became tired.

I began to stink.

I became invisible.

I wanted to escape.

Back in this moment: I found another hat, and I sat down once more. *"Get a job,"* is shouted again.

I can't; I can't find clean. I need another —

A stranger drops \$5 into my hat.

I'm no longer alone.

Unfortunately, if tomorrow doesn't find better, one day, tomorrow will never come, and the destiny of the man/woman above will be a sad invisible story washed off the cold concrete.

I don't know if there is a solution to this global problem. I think it is part of destiny for some. Any of us could fall through societal cracks. It's sad. But maybe it's simply reality.

Like most people, I wish the problem wasn't there for us to see. I hope everyone was dealt better life cards. But, of course, I'd like mine to be a Royal Flush.

Is it hypocritical wishing for that?

I do know; one time in my journey, I wasn't too far away from not knowing where my next "anything" was going to come from. Luckily, a few dear friends enabled me, saving me from homelessness.

A FINAL PASSING NOTE

Before you jump to judgment or try to guess how much these lost souls make while you slave away at work, and before you discount the treacherous life experiences some people have to endure – remember, they're human, and they are begging for change.

And besides, before your final verdict comes in, ask yourself: *what are you going to consume today just to survive? And did you pay for it with change?*

A REALITY CHECK

I gave fifteen years of my life to a company, enriching everyone who worked there. A once-in-a-century pandemic hits. The company deemed me expendable. I was replaced. A few paragraphs above in this story, I said, "one time in my journey" – well, unfortunately, I am not immune to suffering. While my replacement and the people who deemed me expendable get ready to celebrate Christmas with family + friends, I have tough decisions to make before I become homeless:

1. What do I do with my eleven-year-old pet?
2. Do I refill my prescriptions?
3. How much longer do I get to live before the stress + homelessness, + hopelessness kills me?

I don't deserve these cards. Cards dealt by greed + a lack of empathy + compassion.

People Matter.

My Life Matters.

I didn't want mine to end this way.

I'm sixty-one. I'm in trouble.

NOTE: As I am on the verge of homelessness, the people who deemed me expendable monitor my every word to put the final nails in my coffin.

THE HOMELESS

I am probably on my way to politically incorrect purgatory for these observations.

In no way do I mean to diminish the plight of the homeless as I have from time to time come precariously close to becoming roofless. So many moons ago, I was facing a car repossession and an eviction notice on the same day.

Kitty, today will be a sad day; we may be losing our two indoor homes.

Fortunately for me, I wasn't alone.

Anyway, homeless, or not, here are a few of my homeless observations I find humour in:

- A homeless person wearing a watch.
- A homeless person riding bike.
- A homeless person with a shopping cart attached to the back of his bike. In a sense, a homeless *U-Haul*.
- *The U-Haul* may be a good name for a lesbian bar.
- A homeless person on rollerblades. Anyone on rollerblades, for that matter.
- A homeless person while on rollerblades pushing a shopping cart.
- A homeless person on a hot summer day (25 Celsius) pushing a shopping cart, which has a hockey stick in it, and:
- A homeless person running.



WHO IS LINDSAY WINCHERAUK?

Lindsay Wincherauk is a fearless writer. He has published two books and has had more than eighteen OPEDs appear in major commuter newspapers. Lindsay wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father (who wasn't his father) worked as a mechanic. His mother (who wasn't his mother) worked as an excellent chef in a diner. In fact, his birth was in a secret place where | society deemed | unfit mothers were sent to give birth in isolation — shading families from shame. If the babies survived being born, usually, they were sold to wealthy Americans or adopted out to farm families.

Lindsay's life began with a lie.

Despite Lindsay's perilous beginnings, starting with deception, Lindsay knew no better and went through life excelling at things, usually in two-year stints. Be that athletics (hall of fame, record holding, one-eyed quarterback), scholastically, career-wise (generating more than \$70 million in revenue for one company), socially, + without question: creatively!

Lindsay's challenging beginning instilled in Lindsay heaping doses of compassion and empathy. Lindsay's life starting out as a lie gave him a keen sense to spot BS from miles away. It also provided him with a dry sense of humour and an understanding those born with silver spoons in their mouths will never be self-aware enough to understand (or admit) their good fortune.

During Lindsay's work career, he was well-liked by all coworkers. Lindsay was also well respected by his diverse collection of clients, developing several fantastic friendships, primarily because Lindsay is known for his unflinching integrity and ability to hold conversations on most topics.

Lindsay's life mantra is:

The most valuable part of life is the fabulous people we meet during our journeys. If you treat people with respect (leaving judgment at the door), and more importantly, by opening doors for those less fortunate or who can't speak up for themselves, you are living a good, compassionate life. Making money at all costs is not the only thing mattering. Life can be difficult + devastatingly unfair.

Lindsay believes sharing vulnerability is what makes us human. Lindsay will never shy away from being honest about his pain.

Lindsay also believes we must stand up for ourselves, + more importantly, for those who are too burdened by the injustices of life, they can't find the strength to stand up for themselves.

SOME THINGS LINDSAY IS MOST PROUD OF ARE WHEN:

- A sixty-year-old employee of his, who had entered a point of life where life had become more struggle than joy (it happens to all of us as we age), said to Lindsay, *"I must thank you. I've listened to how you treat people, + by listening, I've learned so much about compassion and patience. Thank you. I consider you a great friend."*
- Another employee who was struggling with addiction thanked Lindsay for his kindness, presenting Lindsay with a Christmas card from him and his girlfriend. Tucked inside the card: lottery tickets.

LINDSAY WINCHERAUK, *compassionate, empathetic, well-read, kind, blessed with unflinching integrity, humour in balance, loved by coworkers + friends alike.*

Lindsay will always stick up for the underdog. Lindsay understands there are countless older people suffering job loss because COVID gave some companies an opportunity to – Lindsay thinks it is essential to draw attention to this life-threatening issue by being the voice for those too broken to speak up for themselves.

Lindsay is currently pitching four manuscripts to publishers and literary agencies. One of the manuscripts (he can't talk about) will blow the roof off the predatory practices of – Lindsay is writing relentlessly and is also pitching OPEDs and short stories, fiction, + non to literary magazines around the globe.

Lindsay has appeared on Breakfast Television, radio programs in Montreal, + several others in the Vancouver area. Lindsay has also been a featured guest on CKNW + CBC, both on several occasions. And Lindsay was a vital witness of a Hate Crime. This led to the first Hate Crime conviction in Canadian legal history, resulting in him being a speaker at an Enough is Enough Rally (anti-violence rally) with dignitaries, politicians, law enforcement, and community leaders in front of a crowd of approximately five thousand.

Lindsay was the **#1 MIXED-TAPE DJ** at the **UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN** for most of the nineteen-eighties, a fact bringing him joy.

Lindsay resides in Vancouver.
